DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 009 PS 023 323

AUTHOR Schultz, Thomas
TITLE National Association of State Boards of Education: Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.
INSTITUTION National Association of State Boards of Education, Alexandria, VA.
PUB DATE 21 Apr 94
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Legal/Legislative/Regulatory Materials (090)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Programs; Coordination; *Early Childhood Education; *Educational Policy; Family Programs; Family School Relationship; Government Role; *Government School Relationship; Hearings; Partnerships in Education; Public Education; *Public Schools; School Community Programs; School Community Relationship; *School Readiness
IDENTIFIERS Family Resource and Support Programs; Family Support; *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This paper consists of a transcript of the testimony of the Director of Early Childhood Services at the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) before the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources on April 21, 1994. The testimony addresses the issue of improving the connections between early childhood programs and public schools. The testimony indicates that the NASBE is increasingly concerned with the challenges of creating a more seamless, comprehensive, equitable system of early childhood and family support services and linking those programs to the public education system. The testimony focused on three points: (1) early childhood programs make a positive difference in the skills, knowledge, confidence, and social capacities of children and families; (2) public schools fail to sustain this positive momentum when children and parents move into kindergarten and the primary grades; and (3) full advantage should be taken of current legislative reforms in Head Start and Title 1 programs to create incentives for more effective partnerships between schools and early childhood programs. (SD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 408 009

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

NASBE PS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources

April 21, 1994

Dr. Thomas Schultz
Director, Early Childhood Services

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Thomas Schultz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 023323

1012 Cameron Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

703-684-4000
FAX 703-836-2313

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Brenda Lilienthal Welburn
Executive Director

Mr. Chairman, I am Tom Schultz, Director of Early Childhood Services at the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). I am pleased to testify today on the issue of improving the connections between Head Start and other early childhood programs and the public schools. I am currently directing a national field research project on the contribution of early childhood programs to education reform, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. However, my connection with this morning's topic began in 1971 when I worked as a consultant to the Project Developmental Continuity, a national demonstration project to improve relationships between Head Start and local public schools, a precursor of the present Head Start Transitions Project initiative. More recently I served as a member of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion and Chair of its Subcommittee on Continuity With Schools.

NASBE and members from state and territorial boards of education are increasingly concerned with the challenges of creating a more seamless, comprehensive, equitable system of early childhood and family support services and linking those programs to our public education system. Our previous policy reports, Right From the Start and Caring Communities have promoted a vision of early childhood which begins with prenatal care and extends through kindergarten and primary grade programs to assure the healthy development of children, active and informed involvement of families, and high rates of success in learning in the crucial early years of life.

I have three simple points to make in my testimony:

- High quality early childhood programs make a positive difference in the skills, knowledge, confidence, and social capacities of children and families.

- All too often, public schools fail to sustain this positive momentum when children and parents move into kindergarten and the primary grades.

- We should take advantage of current legislative reform in Head Start and Title 1 programs to create incentives for more effective partnerships between schools and early childhood programs.

The Positive Effects of High Quality Early Childhood Programs

Every policy leader in America is now familiar with the statistical evidence on the positive impact of Head Start and other high quality child care, family support, and preschool initiatives. I'd like to augment this quantitative data with examples from our recent case studies of seven exemplary early childhood agencies. In particular I will highlight three examples of how good early childhood programs work to support and involve parents:

- The James E. Biggs Early Childhood Center in Covington, Kentucky's school system welcomes 262 four-year-old children to its classrooms each day and provides extensive opportunities for parent involvement. Last year, 112 parents participated in the Center's 12-hour training course to prepare themselves to assist teachers in classrooms and then contributed over 1600 days of volunteer time to the Center. In addition, over 100 fathers show up with their children for periodic "Dad's Night" events.

- Child Development, Inc. in Russelville, Arkansas, the Head Start grantee for eleven rural counties, provides a wide range of part-day and full-day classes for children, as well as home-based parent education and adult literacy services to its 2300 families. Parents say the

following things about the impact of this agency's work:

> "Before I became involved with CDI I was terrified of going anywhere. I didn't want to leave the security of my house. If I hadn't been in the program, I wouldn't have my GED, I wouldn't have volunteered at our elementary school and I wouldn't be registered today as a student at Arkansas Tech. University."

- The Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center in Marin County, California provides child care to ninety low and moderate income families with children from 2 months through 10 years of age and provides extensive outreach and support to parents. Here is what Superintendent Frank Kelly of the local Ross Valley School District says about the agency:

> "What I've seen over twenty years is the Center being a place where parents can go and connect with an advocate...I think of young kids who came in as high school dropouts with babies and learned how to take care of their kids, how to care for themselves and how to develop a positive self-concept that they could reflect back to the children...Here were people that were a burden on society, and they learned to elevate themselves into productive human beings..."

These testimonies demonstrate the efficacy of investing in high quality early childhood initiatives. In addition, they suggest that public schools have the opportunity to take advantage of a cadre of skilled and motivated parents and children coming from early childhood centers into elementary schools each year.

A Fumbled Opportunity: Glitches in How Schools Receive Young Children and Families

> "We try to stir up the love of learning in children and hopefully it transfers. But I've seen some kids who are turned off to learning in kindergarten. In Head Start we talk and interact with the children in activities, but in some kindergartens the rules are 'sit in your assigned seat and do your work.'" (Head Start teacher, Child Development, Inc., Russelville, AR.)

> "Many of our families move from being curious to attending meetings, from being involved in an activity to taking a leadership role, from being an advocate in our community to going before the state legislature to support a bill. But after they leave us, there's often a total drop off in involvement, because the public schools are not viewed as welcoming parents to engage in activities or in planning. Unless you are sophisticated enough to know how policy is made at the school board level, it is hard to see what your role is. So parents become very frustrated." (Barbara Shaw, Executive Director, Parent-Child Development Centers, Inc., Oakland, CA)

These two quotes, gathered in the course of our recent field research define two problems in the relationships between our nation's early childhood programs and our public schools. First, in too many instances, children who are turned on to engaging, active, developmentally appropriate forms of learning are stymied when they encounter less responsive forms of instruction in the early school years. Second, many parents become accustomed to substantial involvement in assisting in early childhood classrooms, participating in policy decisions about the program and receiving substantial parent education, adult literacy and other services. However, when these parents move into the public schools, they sometimes encounter more limited options for engagement in their child's classroom, fewer resources to support their involvement, and more wary or grudging attitudes towards their participation from school administrators and staff.

Early childhood programs are far from perfect and there are many exemplary elementary schools which do superb work with children and families. However, I have heard a sufficient number of accounts such as those cited above to be convinced that we need enhanced efforts to improve the response of schools to children and families at the early elementary grade level. To bolster this contention, two recent national studies found substantial discontinuities in practices in early childhood and kindergarten classrooms:

- Prekindergarten programs provide an average of one staff member for each 9.3 children, while in kindergarten classes the ratio increases to 1:16.7. (Seppanen, p.100)

- Ratings on an observational scale designed to assess adherence to developmentally appropriate forms of instruction and activities revealed 40% of the prekindergarten teachers were rated as using appropriate practices "very much" while only 17% of kindergarten

teachers were so rated; while only 8% of kindergarten teachers were observed using inappropriate practices "not at all" as compared with 40% of the prekindergarten staff. (Seppanen, p.103).

- 58% of parents of prekindergarten children report talking with teachers on a daily basis, while only 23% of kindergarten students do so. (Seppanen, p.128)

- Only 50% of a national sample of elementary schools offer opportunities for parents to serve on school committees, and only 37% provide parents education workshops. (Love, p.45). These are mandatory forms of parent involvement in every Head Start program.

Policy Recommendations

Bill Galston, President Clinton's Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy and a member of the Head Start Advisory Committee provides a useful image to depict the ideal relationship between Head Start and Title I. He argues the programs should form segments in a multistage rocket, where two major federal initiatives create a powerful synergistic impact on the educational success of at-risk children. Instead, at present the Head Start "engine" is succeeding in the lift-off phase for most of its participants, but the Title I "booster" is frequently misfiring, allowing gravity to pull children and parents out of their higher orbit.

Fortunately, Congress is in a position to have considerable impact on this problem, due to the coincidence of major redesign and expansion of both Head Start and Title 1 this year. As you know, the Head Start Act Amendments of 1994 require every Head Start grantee to coordinate with local education agencies in creating procedures to transfer records, to promote communication between

Head Start participants and school staff, and to provide support for joint staff and parent training. The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families will continue to fund their thirty-two Head Start Transitions Programs for an additional two years and the Head Start Bureau is supporting a contract to create materials and provide training and technical assistance on transition issues. In discussions of these proposals in the Advisory Committee and with the Head Start community, the major concern is that Head Start grantees will be held accountable for creating new partnerships with public schools, but there is no parallel mandate placed on school administrators. Title I reauthorization offers an important opportunity to rectify this apparent imbalance.

Based on our review of the Administration's proposal and provisions enacted in the House of Representatives, we recommend the following ways to improve the influence of Title I on instructional and parent involvement practices and to encourage more positive partnerships between schools and community early childhood programs:

- Require that schools collaborate with early childhood program leaders, including Head Start Directors, in formulating overall needs assessments, strategies, policies, and allocations of resources in Title I programs, especially schoolwide projects.

- Create explicit provisions encouraging the use of Title I and Title II resources to support joint staff development strategies and activities, to bring together teachers from kindergarten and primary grade classrooms, Head Start centers, and other community-based early childhood agencies to receive training on curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues and to exchange information and perspectives on how they are working with children and families.

- Expand parent involvement provisions in Title I to explicitly target outreach efforts to parents of entering kindergarten students, and to take advantage of the capacity of parent leaders and volunteers from Head Start and other programs. Schools should be welcoming their involvement in school programs, providing training and support in connecting them with Title 1 and other school- and district-level policy committees, and engaging them in the new proposed Parent-School compact mechanism.

Let me close with two caveats. First, in my experience, effective collaboration depends on mutual respect and trust by leaders of the partnering organizations. Neither Head Start nor Title I legislation can directly influence these personal relationships. However, federal policy can provide resources and incentives to overcome the costs of reaching across organizational boundaries - and it can provide requirements which may nudge skeptical or reluctant local managers to work together in new ways.

Second, we should consider recommendations to promote transitions activities within the full context of other policy changes in Head Start and in Title I. In both systems, we are creating ambitious agendas for structural reform and quality improvement. Key leaders in responding to transitions provisions in these bills (Head Start Directors, state and local Title I Directors, and school principals) will also be responsible for implementing a complex and demanding set of other changes in policy and practice. For example, Head Start Directors will be dealing with new requirements for staffing programs, enhanced parent involvement requirements, new opportunities to serve young children and to serve children in full-day, full-year modes of service, and new requirements for community-based planning and needs assessment. Similarly, Title I programs have expanded opportunities to utilize school-wide strategies, adjustment to higher levels of expectation for student

learning, new forms of performance assessment, and new forms of parent involvement. These other mandates will complicate the minds, calendars, and budget planning of early childhood and school managers. However, our hopes for smoother transitions and greater success for children and parents ultimately depend on high quality services and exemplary professional practice in both the preschool and the early school environments.

References

Love, J., Ryer, P., and Faddis, B. (1992). Transitions to Kindergarten in American Schools. Final Report of the National Transition Study. (Contract No. LC88089001) Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Seppanen, P., Godin, K., Metzger, J., Bronson, M., Chichon, D. (1993). Observational Study of Early Childhood Programs. Final Report Volume II: Chapter 1-Funded Early Childhood Programs. (Contract No. EALC890980). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.